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# Two Testify On CIA Mail Spying

By George Lardner Jr.  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Two former postmasters general insisted under oath yesterday that they could not recall being told of the Central Intelligence Agency's secret mail intercepts despite testimony by former CIA Director Richard Helms that both men were briefed.

Helms, for his part, testified that he believes he also told President Johnson about the secret mail-opening project in 1967, some six years before it was abandoned.

Helms told the Senate intelligence committee that he didn't know whether any other President had been notified during the project's 20-year history, but he emphasized that he couldn't rule it out.

Former Postmasters General J. Edward Day and Winton M. Blount refused to acknowledge to the committee that the CIA mail openings were illegal.

"The CIA is and always has been something very different and very special," asserted Day, who headed the Post Office Department for two years under President Kennedy. "I had absolutely no control over them."

The committee's minority counsel, Curtis Smothers, demanded to know whether Day felt this lack of control applied "even if they were opening the mail."

"The thought never entered my mind," Day said.

CIA officials have openly admitted that their 20-year mail-opening project, which was targeted at correspondence to and from the Soviet Union, was illegal, but Day said that "even today" he was not at all sure of that.

Blount, the Nixon administration's first postmaster general, took the same position. He said Helms told him of the CIA's project in a general way at a meeting in

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1971, but Blount said he didn't ask, and couldn't recall being told, whether it involved opening any letters.

Committee counsel Fritz Schwarz protested at one point that Blount's testimony "didn't make any sense." He said he couldn't understand why Blount asked Helms whether the project was legal—as Blount has said he did—if Blount had not first been told that the mail was being opened.

Blount gave no direct answer at first, but later, under questioning by Sen. Walter Mondale (D-Minn.), said he "understood the national security was involved . . . it was my intention to be fully supportive as long as this program was legal."

A millionaire Alabama businessman, Blount said he thought Helms told him that the legality would be checked with then-Attorney General John N. Mitchell. Other testimony, however, has indicated that Helms had already checked with Mitchell. In any case, Blount asserted:

"As far as I was concerned, it was settled with the Attorney General."

Day, who got a visit in February of 1961 from Helms, then-CIA Director Allen Dulles and CIA official Cornelius Roosevelt, maintained that he was told even less than Blount.

"Mr. Dulles said he wanted to tell me something very secret," Day recalled. He said he told Dulles he didn't want to hear about it—for fear of being blamed in case the secret, whatever it was, leaked.

Day said he would do the same thing again, even today.

Both Blount and Day were sharply disputed both by members of the Senate committee and by former Postmaster General John A. Gronouski who, CIA documents and testimony show, was never told of the program.

Gronouski said he would have put a stop to it if he'd been aware of it. He said he made every effort when he was postmaster general from

1961 to 1965 to find out about ever questionable "mail covers" that were being conducted.

"If I had had any inkling that the CIA or any other agency was not only opening the mail but even interrupting the mail, I would have put a stop to it," Gronouski said. He said he "deplored" the "I don't want to know" attitude Day expressed.

Helms' testimony was the first indication that any President had been informed of the project although former chief U.S. postal inspector William J. Cotter, a former CIA official who helped bring it to an end, has said he was always convinced it had been approved at the highest levels.

Reiterating that view in testimony earlier yesterday, Cotter pointed out that the White House "special group" that was supposed to be in charge of covert CIA activities had to be notified of every

move of the U-2 flight program with which Cotter had also been associated.

Helms, now ambassador to Iran, said he believes he mentioned the controversial mail-opening to Johnson at a private meeting in the spring of 1967 in which they discussed other intelligence matters as well.

"I have no record of this," Helms told the committee. "I can only tell you it was a belief I had."

Helms was not asked by the committee what LBJ's reaction was. But the former CIA director told a reporter during a break that "if" his memory was correct, he believes Johnson "shrugged" and at least implicitly gave the project his approval.

Asked about former President Nixon, Helms said he did not recall ever discussing the mail intercept program with him.